

This is Part Three of a three-part series that we hope will inaugurate an ongoing exploration of an American form of socialism, how it would work, and what it would reject or build upon in the American historical experience. We invite responses to the series as well as original articles on the subject. Our hope is to stimulate American socialists to develop critical and concrete thinking about the practical problems of a socialist economy in the U.S.

By Leland Stauber

The political power of the conservative business community in the U.S. rests only in part on its own immediate resources, considerable as these are. Indirect power—the ability to utilize circumstances that are not of its own making and are ultimately beyond its control—is of far greater importance.

Given the importance generally accorded to economic performance, a trump card held by capitalists has been socialists' inability to devise an economically efficient alternative to private ownership of the bulk of big business. I have previously suggested that, on this point, the 20th century has been a graveyard of socialist ideas. American socialism has been no exception.

Socialist sympathies in the U.S. are—have always been—more widespread than support for the tiny parties of the left would indicate. The Democratic party contains today, and has contained for decades, groups who accept private ownership of most big business, not because they like it but because they feel socialists have no solutions to the administrative problems inherent in a socialist alternative. Many Americans' attitude towards socialists amounts to this: "Unless you can explain how to avoid the evils of existing systems, we won't be persuaded. Either come up with something better than capitalism or shut up."

A few questions:

(1) What is to prevent a socialized economy from being a vast bureaucratic monstrosity? If excessive government involvement in the economy is to be prevented, through what institutional structures is this to happen? Who is to hire and fire management in such vast parts of the economy? In a "government-owned" economy is this going to be done by government? What is to prevent such powers of appointment from being used for political purposes—including anti-democratic purposes?

(2) How can public investment funds be allocated to the most efficient and productive enterprises and denied to the least efficient and productive? If the competitive market is to be replaced by "democratic planning," with democratic representation of different regional and local interests, what is to prevent the "planning" from becoming another name for pork-barrel politics?

What is to prevent an accumulation of uneconomic subsidies to inefficient and obsolete enterprises, as workers and localities clamor for protection against closures of plants? When financing is allocated to firms how is the public to know what is a subsidy and what isn't? How can the profitability of an industry or plant be determined as clearly as in the operation of the competitive market?

(3) If the tradition of *unqualified* workers' self-management basically underestimates the need for professional management, how is this role to be preserved and protected and integrated into a socialist system? How is the management of firms to be appointed?

(4) Is political party patronage to be extended into the management of firms in the socialized sectors, as in Italy and countless other countries? If not, how is this to be prevented? How, again, is the managerial function to be protected?

In the face of such questions, American socialists have generally put their heads in the sand. Our "socialist" publications are full of every conceivable subject *except* thought about these problems; indeed, there is probably no subject most socialists want to discuss less than the difficult dilemmas of how to prevent or manage the many unsavory potentialities of socialism.

PERSPECTIVES

□ FOR A NEW AMERICA □

For a socialism that works: Part III

But unless socialists can provide solid answers to these and other questions, the conservative business community and the Republican party have nothing to fear from America's socialists; they can rightly conclude they are a scatter-brained bunch—and therefore harmless.

This is the real state of the American socialist movement today—a vacuum of practical socialist ideas. The symptoms abound. Such problems, it is said, will be solved by "history." Instead of discussing these fundamental questions it is more "relevant" to hold conferences on the prospects of "the left" in the next presidential election. Or, it is said, socialists should concentrate their minds on agitation for liberal reforms in order to build "the movement"; a socialist program will materialize "later." Or, socialist organizations are "too fragile" to withstand discussion of such baffling and divisive issues, so they are best avoided in order to hold "the organization" together.

Some answers:

But all of this puts the cart before the horse. No "socialist movement" can be built upon a vacuum of practical socialist ideas. Capitalist political power, by contrast, rests, by default, precisely on that foundation.

To fill this vacuum the needed ideas must derive, not from romanticized portrayals of existing socialist systems, but from understanding of the *defects* of those systems. The needed ideas must provide, not vague slogans and misty hopes, but direct and practical answers to these defects.

To do this, some of the most sacred cows of socialist tradition will have to be dispatched to slaughter. You are going to need, within the framework of social ownership, a major role for a *purely commercial* institution. This violates one of the most sacrosanct dogmas of socialist tradition—that "public bodies should never be purely commercial." But precisely

by violating that dogma we can remove every single one of the really major administrative difficulties of a socialist system.

Thus, as to problem 1 above, national government power and bureaucracy can be limited by retaining the stock-company form of organization for firms, using this to disperse the ownership of each firm, and vesting that ownership in thousands of local public investment banks controlled by local governments. Simultaneously, national government regulation of these banks can be used to organize a national capital market and to insulate firms from political influences of individual local governments by permitting each bank to own only a small percentage of the stock of any given firm.

As to problem 2 above, the economic discipline of the market can be created by having the allocation of regular (external) investment funds to firms take place through a capital market that is separate from government. This means that when governments do intervene in the economy, to subsidize socially desirable but uneconomic activities, these measures will be far more visible and exposed to political challenge than if the regular financing of firms is decided within administrative agencies of government. The purpose of this is not *laissez-faire*; it is to put maximum pressure on governments to take direct political responsibility for the intervention they undertake.

As to problem 3 above, the needed role for professional management can be provided by having the management of firms appointed, not primarily by their employees, but primarily by financial institutions that receive profits from the firms and thus have a direct stake in their management on profit-and-loss principles.

As to problem 4 above, the most effective way to limit political party patronage in management is to create a situation where, as in private business, the appointment of management is removed as far

as possible from government and politics and the atmosphere is dominated by commercial motives and incentives.

The type of socialism that would make the most sense economically, however, would also be the most strategic politically, not only here but also in other countries. Not only does the U.S. need socialism, but the American predilection for pluralism and the market would be good for socialism as an international movement. It could vastly expand both its economic flexibility and its political potency in allowing wedges to be driven into the coalitions that comprise socially conservative political power. In this country, it could eventually become the program of the Democratic party.

A network of thousands of local public investment banks, which could contract out parts of their portfolio management to local stock brokerage firms and other local financial institutions, would be thoroughly decentralized and pluralistic. Precisely by violating much "orthodox" tradition, it would, in the context of American culture, be as comfortable as the corner drugstore and as sound as Herbert Hoover.

To the broad liberal camp, both its popular constituencies and its elite establishments—people who know big business is their political enemy but fear both bureaucratic and syndicalist socialism—we could explain a concrete plan that can remove both of those fears and explain how conservative power is supported by their own traditional belief in the sanctity of private property.

For a century in the U.S. the holders of concentrated wealth and the major parties have told us we need the sacrosanct system of "free enterprise" to save us from "the concentration of power" of socialism. That argument is a two-edged sword. Let us make it come home to roost.

Our conservative business community perennially opposes federal government actions for progressive and decent purposes—in a thousand different fields—and professes a love for local institutions. Fipe. That fits American tradition. Let us give it to them.

But American socialists are going to have to decide whether they want to hear themselves repeat fixed dogmas of their own or whether they want to see the results we are talking about here.

Leland Stauber is professor of political science, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. He is the author of the forthcoming book, *Market Socialism and the Problems of Control: A Reappraisal of Practical Experience*. The views outlined in his three-part series are presented in greater detail in his article, "A Proposal for a Democratic Market Economy," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, Sept. 1977.

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LIFE IN THE U.S.

SPORTS

Everyone's a hero in the Big Race

By Anita Diamant

E O S T I O N

ALMOST 27 MILES LONG, INVOLVING OVER 4,000 RUNNERS and almost half a million live viewers, the Boston Marathon is quite a show. People come to run in it from around the world. And still more come to town to clean up on the business of running.

Millions of words have been written about the 82 runnings of the Boston Marathon. The winners have been profiled; the crowds discussed, praised and rebuked; the wheelchair entries have been reverently hailed; even the "little people" who run without official numbers have had their day in print. But still, there is no way to tell the full story of the Marathon.

I spent two full days with the race. I was disgusted and inspired, shocked and awed. I was glad when it was over, and proud to have been there.

★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆

There are people in Boston who don't know about the Marathon. It's a feature of Patriot's Day, like the neighborhood parades and the "re-enactment" out in Lexington, that many people simply ignore. It's a traffic jam.

But for runners—in Boston and around the world—the Marathon is the race of the year, the race of a lifetime.

The Marathon starts earlier every year. This year it began, in earnest, on Saturday, the start of a weekend of seminars, running "shows" and full hotels.

Sunday, 1,100 people paid \$10 for a day-long conference called "Boston Marathon Sports Medicine Running Seminar"—lots of doctors, podiatrists, trainers, coaches, but mostly runners.

The most popular presentation was a lecture by Dr. George Sheehan, M.D. If you're not a runner who's into the culture, that name probably means nothing to you. But if you can identify Ron Hill, Jack Fultz or Joan Ulyot as easily as Bill Rodgers or Frank Shorter, you're familiar with the Guru of Running.

The movie that followed Dr. Sheehan's talk (starring the good doctor himself) drew gasps of amazement and spontaneous applause from the whole audience (including me) as we watched all kinds of people completing last year's race; at the story and sight of a one-legged man finishing the New York City marathon in just over six hours on his prosthesis; at the apple-faced 80-year-old woman who jogs a mile every morning; at 30, 40 and 50-year-old people in smiling good health. Watching it, you felt that human bodies were built to run, as well as think, love and work.

A circulation booster.

The YMCA gym next door held the running trade's show: tables of shoes, shirts and shorts, mini-slide shows, reflectors, sweat bands and "literature."

The *Runner's World* table was in the middle of the floor, holding court. Referred to as the runner's "bible" in everything from *Rolling Stone* to the *Wall Street Journal*, *Runner's World* has been around and growing for the past 12 years. Last year the circulation doubled.

Circulation manager Robin Wolander said that the magazine had gone from 70,000 in July 1977 to 240,000 in April '78. She thinks that circulation might eventually level off at one million, "but don't tell my boss I said that."

Wolander, like every other runner (and running magnate), believes that running

is here to stay. "I don't believe it's a fad. Every marathon we have covered has doubled in size in the last year."

"As a runner I know I'd never stop. As a woman, I feel more assertive. I can do anything."

Robin Wolander wants to run Boston next year.

Charlene Vettorello started running eight years ago. Always a physical person, "I got tired of swimming—the hair business. Besides, running is a lot easier. It's cheap and you don't need a pool."

A Motor City Strider (the Detroit AAU club), the 82nd Boston Marathon was her fifth marathon race. Last year she finished in three hours and 25 minutes, the 48th woman to finish.

"I discovered myself after running. I have become mentally stronger, more goal oriented and physically stronger. It opens up a lot. Makes you want to explore other parts of your life. It opened me up to people, mostly to other runners or people connected to fitness."

Charlene's last long run was the preceding Friday—12½ miles. The day before the race, she was "nervous but riding high."

"I have a terrible hunger to finish. When I started training ten weeks ago I said, 'By God, if I'm going to go through this, I'm going to finish.' All the time, trouble and expense. Even if I have to walk, I'll finish."

"But it may not be my day. You never know. When you're running you do the best you can. And when you finish, you let go of it."

Everyone's a hero.

Everyone who finishes in Boston is something of a hero. Tom Plumly was sitting in the lobby of the YMCA where beer, cookies and apple juice were ready for women marathoners. Since none had arrived yet, Tom was the guest of honor, a hero. He was in pain from the neck down, but his smile didn't fade.

It took about two and a half minutes before Tom's group started to run in Hopkinton at noon. He crossed the finish line (26 miles and 385 yards away) two hours and 53 minutes later.

It had been a perfect day for running—cool, no sun. There were few complaints about the race itself. "The crowds got too close along the way so that runners tripped each other and the finish was bad." But Tom still thought it was "the nicest marathon I've been to because of the people." Going up Heartbreak Hill the crowds were an asset. "The more people there to cheer, the fewer the drop-outs."

He wanted me to make sure I wrote down what he had to say about the running mystique: "I think runners are better off running than reading those books."

Tom came from Fairbanks, Alaska, to run the Boston Marathon. "It was worth it," he said. "I'll be back."

I never found Charlene Vettorello on the day of the race. But I saw her name and number in the newspaper. W132, she finished 130th among the women with a time of 3:31:23.

Runner's World has started a new publication called *On the Run*, a *Rolling Stone*-type bi-monthly. Dr. George Sheehan is on the cover of the first edition, but the story, by *Boston Globe* sportswriter Peter Gammons, stresses Sheehan's spiritual leadership rather than his physiological theories. "Runners," he posits, "are secular saints."

Runner's World founder Bob Anderson's opening "editorial" is even more explicit: "...because of its spiritual nature,



Nova Tringale



Peggy McMahon

Top: Boston Marathon winner Bill Rodgers leans on Ellen Rodgers, his wife; Bottom: Runners came from all over the world, including this runner from Japan.

running is a movement, a religion. It is a way of overcoming the pressures of society, a way of discovering the limits of your power.

"Someone once said, 'For humanity to survive, it will have to invent a new religion.' The religion has been invented. It is the religion of the runner. Its power is increasing."

The mystification of running makes for good business, lousy theology and worse morality. It's sold as "me-centered" and chic, a way to ease the tensions of a full, sedentary life. It's even being touted as a way out of feeling guilty or responsible for the ills of society; as a sort of behaviorist therapy for depression.

Running is good for the body and probably as good for the soul. But the running mystique only serves to further alienate people from each other, from a sense of

their connectedness and dependence upon others. It can even cut you off from feeling good about yourself: looking for that much-vaunted runner's high, ignoring the pain in your knees too long, feeling constrained to keep running even if maybe you'd rather walk. The dictatorship of fashion can co-opt even as pure and simple a pleasure as running.

Articulating the delight without bombast or hyperbole or false promises does not sell shoes or magazines or books. Just as the "sexual revolution" has been used to sell and distort sexuality, so the "running revolution" is trying to take away a free and natural function and return it to us with a manufactured need for professional guidance, and a price tag.

Anita Diamant writes regularly on sports for *IN THESE TIMES*.